

THE ADULT MALE ALTO
OR
COUNTER-TENOR VOICE.

G. Edward Stubbs, Mus. Doc.

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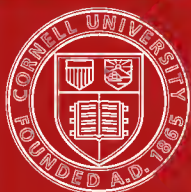
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The Adult Male Alto

OR

Counter-Tenor Voice

BY

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PREFACE

The adult male alto is what may be styled an "ecclesiastical" voice. It is not much used outside of church choirs, and it has most unfortunately, and ignorantly, been confounded with a tabooed voice, from which, scientifically, it is completely dissociated.

Consequently the subject treated in the following pages is not a popular one. Notwithstanding the enormous advance made by male choirs in recent years, a large majority of musicians, voice trainers, organists, choirmasters, music critics, etc., are not interested therein. A goodly number are actively opposed to ecclesiastical tradition, and to any further growth in the "boy choir" movement, as it is sometimes (and very erroneously) called.

A topic that appeals only to the minority, and is sniffed at by the majority, is not one that a writer embraces with avidity. Perhaps it is for this reason that so little has been written about the Counter-tenor. Ridicule and abuse are valuable enough in their way, and often serve important educative ends, but the Counter-tenor voice has suffered from an over-dose of these correctives.

The readers of this book may not side with the author in the views presented. But on two salient particulars they will agree with him. The first is that the multiplication of male choirs has caused a coincident demand for adult male altos—a demand that

must be filled. And the second is that progress in any department of knowledge is not made by dodging the issues involved, and by keeping silence.

In these two points the author finds ample reason for setting forth what he has written.

Moreover there are vocal questions of the most vital importance connected with falsetto singing—problems that have a direct bearing upon voice production in general.

The thanks of the writer are specially due to Mr. John Van Broekhoven of New York, author of the unique and scientific work entitled "The True Method of Tone Production," for his valuable contribution to Chapter VI., on the true nature of the falsetto register, and the harmlessness and usefulness of falsetto singing when practiced intelligently.

Also to The H. W. Gray Company of New York, for permission to make advance quotations from the above work.

St. Agnes' Chapel, Trinity Parish, N. Y.
January, 1908.

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The Adult Male Alto, or Counter-Tenor Voice.

CHAPTER I.

OWING to the growth of the choral service in this country, and the consequent increase in the number of male choirs, there has sprung up in recent years a demand for the adult male alto that is considerably in advance of the supply.

Notwithstanding the fact that the counter-tenor voice has amply demonstrated its usefulness, it has been unaccountably neglected not only by teachers of singing, but also by writers on vocal science. The literature on the subject is scanty, consisting for the most part of occasional communications that have appeared in newspapers, magazines, and musical journals. Much thus presented has been

A Neglected Voice the chance expression of individual taste and opinion, and has been to a great extent amateurish in its character, and proportionately unreliable. The object of this treatise is to impart some additional and more accurate information relative to a

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voice that is becoming more and more indispensable in the artistic rendition of the choral service.

Although the use of the counter-tenor is restricted to the Episcopal Church, and to the other religious bodies employing male choirs, no voice has ever been subjected to such unrestricted censure and abuse. The mere novelty of it has had much to do with this. A voice that is looked upon as "odd," and "new-fangled," naturally arouses a certain amount of musical distrust and suspicion, and is apt to be misunderstood. As far as this country is concerned, the counter-tenor may be said to have come into existence in the most casual fashion. The voice was practically unknown until the traditional choir came into favor. Though our male choirs date back more than half a century, they were not extensively introduced until about the year 1880. Prior to that time their growth was slow and laborious. At first the alto part was assigned to boys, who were sometimes assisted by women.

Dr. Edward Hodges, the pioneer of cathedral tradition in this country, who was organist and choirmaster of Trinity Church, New York, from 1839 to 1858, was perhaps the first of our imported organists who understood the

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counter-tenor voice; but he was so seriously handicapped by ignorant opposition, and by the chaotic condition of church music at the time of his appointment, he could not establish the kind of choir he had been accustomed to in England. For alto purposes he was obliged to employ both boys and women. His successor, Dr. Henry Stephen Cutler, who was organist of Trinity from 1858 to 1865, got rid of the women bequeathed to his choir by Dr. Hodges, as soon as he could, and used boys only as altos and sopranos. If he knew anything of the counter-tenor he did not put his knowledge into practice. The writer, who was one of his pupils, never heard him so much as mention the voice. Dr. Cutler trained his alto boys to use the lower register entirely. He made no attempt at equalisation,—in fact, his altos carried the chest register all the way up to fourth line D, and the problem of the break was thus effectually and summarily disposed of! We mention this matter here because the use of the chest register of the boy alto, as heard in the majority of choirs, forms one of the strongest arguments in favor of the counter-tenor, as we shall see later.

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FROM time to time cathedral trained counter-tenors came over from England.

Some of these drifted into the interior, and became vocally lost through lack of occupation. Others obtained positions in choirs in Boston, New York and Philadelphia, where they were welcomed as valuable choristers, but nevertheless regarded more or less as vocal curiosities.

In course of time, these English choristers were copied by other singers who had the temerity to follow in their footsteps. But the copying process was mere clumsy, haphazard imitation. Of

Lack of Training

scientific vocal training there was none. Singing teachers knew nothing whatever of the "new" voice, and were amazed at the very mention of it. Small wonder, then, that prejudice increased as "novelty" wore off! Left to shift for itself, the voice followed its own inclinations. Counter-tenors taught themselves, and picked up what little vocal information they could get. What they did get was the most caustic kind of criticism.

Dr. Samuel Smiles has taught us the value of self-help, and all the world honors and admires a self-made man; but a petition for deliverance from the self-made male alto deserves

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a place in the Litany. Under such circumstances the very survival of the voice almost commands respect. With a similar handicap any voice might have run the gauntlet of extermination. But the ridiculed and abused counter-tenor was simply too useful to die, and by living it has more than justified itself.

With the enrichment of the musical ritual, the restoration of Choral Communion, and the introduction of elaborate anthems and services, the demand for sight readers became urgent. Choirmasters had all they could do to train their sopranos, and they begrudged the time spent upon boy altos. Then there was the loss of voice at mutation to be taken into consideration, so, on the whole, the juvenile alto became a difficult proposition.

THE counter-tenor, coming upon the scene at this juncture, fulfilled an important mission, in spite of its many imperfections. What we have said of the prejudice against it applies more particularly to the musical profession in the United States. This bias was considerably aggravated by the attitude of organists and teachers of singing who were hostile to the movement in favor of male choirs. The former were accustomed to the American quartet of two men and two

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women, and dreaded the training of a large chorus of boys and men. They prophesied the

Opposition of Organists

final extinction of the surpliced male choir, looked upon it as a passing "fad," and taught their pupils to have nothing whatever to do with it. They ridiculed the singing of boys, the cathedral service, and everything connected therewith. Vocal teachers naturally joined forces with the organists, and lent their influence to the suppression of a form of choir which in their opinion would deprive them of pupils.

The counter-tenor of course came in for its share in the general denunciation.

In Europe this voice is not the novelty that it is here. Not only is it employed in the choirs of the Anglican, Greek and Roman churches, but there is also a wide field for its use in secular music. There are great numbers of glees, part songs, madrigals, etc., composed, for, and arranged for, adult male voices, in which the counter-tenor plays an important part.

Yet abroad, where the voice is well known, it has been neglected by singing masters. A good deal of ignorant prejudice surrounds it even in England and on the continent. Voice trainers are apt to spend most of their time

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on voices that are in special demand for solo singing. Tenors receive the highest remuneration, and sopranos come next in market value, consequently these voices absorb most study and attention. In modern ecclesiastical music the counter-tenor has comparatively little opportunity for solo work. But perhaps the most popular argument against the counter-tenor, and the one with the least scientific foundation, is that it is an unnatural voice,—a contention that has arisen from the careless and misguided use of the falsetto of the light uncultivated bass, and from the confusion of the different kinds of counter-tenor. To this we shall refer again.

IN this country the counter-tenor has been introduced to the public under the worst possible circumstances. When once opinion has been thoroughly formed, it is difficult to change it. The public are apt to take a voice, generically, as they find it, and at its face value. Thus the coarse, rasping voices of boys, as heard in public schools and in concerts where juveniles sing in chorus, convey an impression that this peculiar fish-horn quality of tone is the special hall-mark of the boy voice, stamping it with a distinctive characteristic, and differentiating it from any other

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kind of voice. As ninety-eight per cent. of boys' voices are badly trained, the pure voicing of a small number of "crack" choirs is insignificant, and wholly inoperative in educating the public on this point. The rough voice is mistaken for the natural one. Give people a certain vocal *timbre*, associated with any kind of voice, and give it to them often enough, and in a sufficiently liberal quantity, and they will accept it as the legitimate article.

Thus the shrill piping of the average counter-tenor, as heard in most of our choirs, is supposed to be the real thing, and it is almost impossible to alter this judgment. Here the parallel ends, for even among musical persons who know good from bad, the boy's coarse *bray* is apt to be overlooked, while the cutting tone of the ill-trained counter-tenor is condemned off-hand, without appeal.

WE have said that the voice is considered "new-fangled," and "novel." One of its most interesting features is its extreme antiquity! It is commonly traced to the time of King Charles the Second, and it is supposed to have come into use in England

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just after the Great Rebellion, when, owing to the previous disbanding of choirs, there were no boys left to sing either alto or treble. As adult voices were then pressed into service to sing the upper parts, musical authorities are over-fond of referring to this period as the dawn of the counter-tenor. It is true that in the verse anthems of Humphrey, Wise, Blow, Purcell and other composers of the School of the Restoration, the status of the counter-tenor was fully acknowledged,—but the voice was even then centuries old, for it made its appearance at the very birth of polyphony. While it is difficult to give the exact date of its origin, it probably came into use for choral purposes during the century preceding or following the year 1200 A. D.

There has been careless writing on this point, especially in England where some musical authorities claim a distinctively Anglican origin for the counter-tenor. Curwen goes so far as to say that the voice is entirely an English institution, unknown on the continent!

John Hullah comes nearer the mark when he states that the voice came into prominence just after the Commonwealth, and that Charles II. desired to reproduce at home “a

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class of voice he had become accustomed to in continental chapels, royal and ducal."

History and etymology both conflict with Curwen's view.

THE terms "alto," "contralto" and "counter-tenor" take us back a long way. In early times all voices were divided into two great classes, the Acute and the Grave. To the former belonged the high voices of men, and to the latter their low voices.

The term "Altus" (from the Latin *altus*, high,—whence alto) was applied to voices of the Acute class, and when two parts were assigned to high voices they were often designated as Altus I., and Altus II. The four vocal parts were also known

Derivation of Terms as Cantus, Altus, Tenor and Bassus. Women singers were not employed at the time of which we speak, and "alto" and "contralto" originally had no reference to them. Although it is now usual to apply the latter term specifically to the female voice, the custom has no etymological foundation, as we shall see.

In understanding the term contralto, or, more accurately, counter-alto, we must take into account that the prefix *contra* (or its

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doublet, *counter*) is used in two ways. *Contra* is Latin for against, and it is a compound of *con* (for *cum*) with, and *tra*, related to *trans*, beyond, which again is related to the root *tar*, to cross over.

As applied to musical instruments, *contra* generally refers to a variety yielding tones an octave lower than the typical form. Thus we have *contra-fagotto*, *contra-gamba*, *contra-basso*, etc. But the prefix *contra* as applied to voices has a different meaning, and one similar to *counter*, in counter-point,—which signifies literally “point against point,”—point being an old name for note. In counterpoint the parts nearest each other proceed *against* each other, sometimes crossing above and below. It is easy to see, then, how *contra* came to be prefixed to *altus*, the lower *altus* moving against the upper, and sometimes crossing it,—whence “contralto.”

The derivation of *counter-tenor* may be explained by the fact that the old “tenor,” or melody (from *teneo*, to hold) may at times have been assigned to one of the various *alti* voices, in which case counter-tenor would have been the same as counter-alto, or contralto.

In short, the terms alto, contralto and counter-tenor, were formerly synonymous. The term “male alto” is, of course, a modern one.

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When all *alti* were males, such an expression would have been considered as ridiculous as "female alto" at the present time. That there was an acknowledged similarity between the tenor and the contralto is fully proved by the so-called *tenore contraltino*. Of this voice, Mr. H. C. Deacon of the Royal College of Music, London (certainly a competent authority), says, "if the singer is not seen, it is quite possible to imagine that one is listening to a female contralto."

THOSE who are opposed to the counter-tenor may perhaps be surprised to learn that Handel employed the voice frequently. In England, prior to the latter part of the eighteenth century, all oratorios and large choral works were performed with the assistance of male altos. As there is no record of the use of the "female alto" until 1773, and as the great composer died in 1759,

The Female Contralto a Modern Voice

it is more than probable that he never in his life heard a woman contralto sing in any of his oratorio choruses! Even his trebles were to a large extent boys, taken from the choirs of the Chapel Royal, St. Paul's Cathedral, and other important churches. The first oratorio in which women

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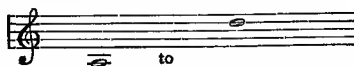
made their appearance as altos was "Judith," composed by Dr. Thomas A. Arne, and performed at Covent Garden on February 26th, 1773. The *novelty* was then the "female alto," and not the counter-tenor.

THERE is every reason to suppose that the present demand for the adult male alto will steadily increase. Male choirs are now in the ascendant. Whereas they formerly existed only on account of ecclesiastical rule and custom, they now exist for that reason *plus* the very important one that the boy voice has demonstrated its utility and musical value beyond all argument. Consequently such choirs are being introduced in churches where ecclesiastical rule often gives way to utilitarianism. In the face of such growth it is hardly wise to treat the counter-tenor voice with neglect and contempt. Furthermore we do not hesitate to say that such treatment is not merely unwise; it is thoroughly unscientific.

Altos we must have, either boys or men. The difficulties connected with the training of the former are alone sufficient to insure the desirability of the latter. And aside from this, it has never been proved that the counter-tenor does not deserve the recognition and legitimate culture accredited to other voices.

CHAPTER II.

THERE ARE two varieties of the counter-tenor voice. First, there is a species of high, light tenor, ranging from



This voice has the following characteristics. The chest and falsetto tones are readily joined, and they are often so blended by nature that it is impossible to detect a difference of register in any part of the vocal range. The upper tones are easily reached, are entirely free from strain, and are full and rich.

Varieties of Counter-Tenor The lower tones, although less powerful and sonorous than in the ordinary tenor, are remarkably pure and free from coarseness. A distinguishing mark of this voice is that the conversational and the singing tones correspond, the former being pitched near the middle of the range.

Second, there is the so-called "falsetto alto," in which the falsetto register is distinctly separated from the chest register; in which there is a break which can only be eradicated by careful training in early adult life; and in which the colloquial and the singing tones do not correspond. The first class of voice is the

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better of the two. But even when round and resonant, possessing all the attributes generally looked for in the well cultivated voice, it is often criticised as being "unnatural," especially if the range is of unusual extent.

HERE we come to the question: "What is an unnatural voice?" We can hardly answer by declaring it to be any kind that is at all out of the common. Such a definition would be unscientific, to say the least of it. Perhaps the best definition is, "one in which tones cannot be produced without vocal strain"—for example, an ill-trained voice, involving the use of a forced register. In all the standard works on singing there are certain kinds of voices that are most unaccountably neglected. Among them we may mention the deep voices of women, and the high voices of men. Many women are capable of singing tenor, and even baritone. They seldom have their voices trained,

Neglected Voices

and in fact seldom sing at all, because they think their vocal tones unnaturally low, and masculine. And on the other hand there are many men who think their voices unnaturally high, and feminine. They also avoid singing, and avoid vocal training, excepting perhaps with a view toward deepening the voice.

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Yet, scientifically speaking, there is nothing at all remarkable in either case. That unusually long and unusually short vocal ligaments occur in both sexes just as naturally as long ears and short noses, has never been disproved by any recognized vocal authority.

Hundreds of men's voices never undergo mutation, and women's voices of tenor and baritone range are not as rare as they are supposed to be. The fact that they are not, as a rule, cultivated for singing purposes, proves nothing whatever but the force of custom.

WE MEET with some striking inconsistencies in the use of the term "unnatural" as applied to voices. The low voice of the woman and the high voice of the man are apt to be looked upon as abnormal, whereas the low voice of the man and the high voice of the woman are considered to be entirely natural, *even when the usual vocal range is transcended in a remarkable degree.*

The ordinary basso does not extend much lower than F below the G clef. But the *basso profondo* extends to C, and the still deeper voice, commonly found in Russia, descends a whole octave lower than the usual bass.

If a very low range in the man excites no adverse comment, pray why should it do so in the case of the woman? A scientific answer is

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difficult, and we can only say that it is not customary for women to cultivate their voices when they extend lower than the contralto range.

The female tenor is not infrequently employed on the vaudeville stage, and in concert halls where variety performances take place, and this tends to stamp the voice as a curiosity, and to lower its artistic status.

The Term Unnatural Misapplied

Nevertheless this voice has often reached a very high degree of excellence. Among celebrated tenorists of this type were Mela, Barlani-Dini, and Selvi. Mela appeared at concerts in London in 1868, and was particularly successful in Rossini's arias for the tenor. Barlani-Dini was widely known throughout Italy. Madame Selvi was at one time the tenor soloist at a prominent church in New York, and was celebrated in operatic circles. She possessed a voice of unusual purity and power, and whenever she sang she was invariably mistaken for a man by those who could not see her. The writer has heard the most laudatory reports of Selvi's singing of the Sanctus in Gounod's "Messe Solennelle," and of important solos in other ecclesiastical compositions. Such voices may be unconventional, and as such they may be subjected to

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any amount of criticism. But physiologically *unnatural* they certainly are not.

IN comparing the very high voices of men with the very high voices of women, we encounter the same sort of criticism. The woman may have an unlimited upward range—the man must not!

The ordinary female soprano rarely has occasion to sing higher than the B flat just above the stave. A great many women dislike to sing even the A, a semitone lower. This fact is abundantly proved in congregational singing. The majority of women slur and “scoop,” even on F and G, when these notes occur in hymn tunes and in other compositions sung by the mass of people in church. But on the other hand there is no surprise manifested when a woman sings up to high C. There are female voices on record that have reached fourth line G above the stave.

Lucrezia Agujari thought nothing of singing the B flat in *altissimo*. Her voice was particularly admired, and the great Mozart went into raptures over it. Such voices are not spoken of as “unnatural.” We see, then, that a woman may have a whole octave of tones, and even *more*, above the normal range, and be as free from adverse

**The
High Male Voice
Misunderstood**

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criticism as the "*basso profondo*" of Russia.

But let the high voice of the man exceed the limit arbitrarily fixed by custom, even *half* an octave instead of a *whole* one, and the case is made out to be different.

NOT only is the genuine counter-tenor a perfectly legitimate voice, but so also is the natural adult male soprano,—that is, the voice that has passed the period of mutation without having been affected by it. An exceedingly beautiful voice of this description was employed in the choir of St. John's Chapel, New York, in 1878. In Europe the writer has heard the unchanged voice in various choirs of renown. The reason why voices of this type seem to be comparatively rare in this country is not that they are actually scarce. Male voices that never mutate are numerous enough. But their owners misunderstand their own singing powers; they do not seek vocal training, but yield quietly to the tyranny of musical fashion, and even endeavor to hide what they consider a vocal defect.

IN ITALY adult male trebles were in great demand, and reached a high degree of training and development during the period 1550-1590. They should not be confounded with the celebrated artificial voices of

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the eighteenth century as exemplified* by Senesino, Carestini, Caffarelli, Farinelli, and others. The history of the Vatican Choir throws much valuable light upon this subject, and helps to dissipate some foolish and fantastic ideas regarding the adult male soprano. Voice culture may be said to have originated in the male choirs of the early church.

In very ancient times the voices of boys and men were used in the Roman choirs, and a choir school was founded in the fourth century

Sixteenth Century by S. Sylvester, whose Pontificate lasted from the year
Voices 314 to 335. The next im-

portant choir school that we hear of was the one founded by S. Hilarius about a century and a half later. These institutions were in course of time supplemented by others, planned on a larger scale. We are told that the term *Scholae Cantorum* was applied to them, and that they were also called *Orphanotrophia*, because they often sheltered fatherless children. Boys were admitted when they were very young, and placed in the Preparatory School, or *Parvisium*. Later, trained singers, both boys and adults, were supplied for the purpose of singing wherever the Pope officiated, and this custom eventually led to the establishment of the Sistine Chapel Choir. Dur-

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ing the latter part of the sixteenth century the boy trebles of this famous body of singers were augmented, and sometimes supplanted, by adult male sopranos imported at first from Spain, where they were trained by vocal teachers who made a specialty of such voices.

There is a strong likelihood that these voices were of two kinds, which in certain characteristics may be said to correspond with the two varieties of counter-tenor already mentioned. There was the natural soprano, that is, the unchanged adult voice; and there was the falsetto soprano. The leading distinction between the two bears an exact analogy to that we have made between the two kinds of counter-tenor.

The natural soprano conversed as he sang, in his soprano range. The falsettist talked as a bass or baritone, or possibly tenor, and sang soprano. Some authorities refer to what they call "the true adult soprano," to which they apply the expression *arte fatta*,—that is, made by vocal training. But the plain truth of the matter is that such a voice is made by nature rather than by art. That some of the Spanish trebles we have spoken of possessed voices that never mutated is highly probable.

And as there was in those early times the natural male soprano, so also was there the

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natural adult male contralto. The latter voice was not considered a rare one, and to it was applied the expression *voce naturale*.

The reader will doubtless observe the significance of the nomenclature: *voce naturale*, and not *voce "unnaturale."* The former term carries peculiar weight when we take into account the artificial operatic sopranists of the seventeenth century, who must be held responsible for the origin of much of the prejudice we have mentioned.

COMPARED with the male soprano, the counter-tenor is quite a low voice. If men can sing, as many can, throughout the ordinary soprano range, easily and without muscular effort, it is far less surprising that they should be able to sing alto.

There are certain laws of voice culture that are universally conceded to be of fundamental importance. One of these is that vocal production should be perfectly natural and free from strain.

It is practically impossible to damage the singing voice when undue muscular effort is habitually avoided. Therein lies the golden rule of singing. Custom should not be allowed to confuse and mislead us on this point. What is fashion-

**Fashion an
Unreliable
Criterion**

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ably unnatural is not of necessity *physiologically unnatural*.

Let the Russian bass sing to unlimited depths if it is easy for him to do so. To make him do otherwise would be to injure his voice.

Mela, Barlani-Dini, and Selvi were perfectly right in singing tenor. It was the part that suited them best. Had their voices been trained to a higher range the process would have resulted in strain and perhaps vocal ruin. So also it would have been foolish to have made Agujari into a mezzo-soprano. And to lower the vocal range of the normal counter-tenor would be to make an unnatural voice out of a natural one.

The second kind of counter-tenor, the "falsetto alto," we shall speak of in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III.

WE HAVE seen that the real counter-tenor is a legitimate voice, in every way worthy of artistic cultivation.

While not as uncommon as it is generally supposed to be, it is *apparently* rare because it so frequently remains undiscovered. There are numbers of natural counter-tenors who are quite unaware that they possess valuable voices, and who pass through their entire lives without singing. In this country the ecclesiastical status of the voice is not yet sufficiently recognized, and male voice glees, part songs, and other secular pieces in which the counter-tenor part is prominent, are little known and seldom performed in public.

If male choirs were employed in *all* churches, and if compositions for the counter-tenor were widely used, the demand for the voice would undoubtedly increase the supply to a very considerable extent.

The voice is not systematically sought for, and what we do not seek we do not find. A most interesting way to discover the proportion of counter-tenor voices, as compared with the number of basses, baritones, and tenors,

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lies through close observation of the *speaking voice*. Among clergymen, actors, lecturers, politicians, and other public speakers, colloquial counter-tenors are not marvelously scarce. Orators may not *sing*, but they are obliged to *speak*, and in speaking they disclose their voices,—as indeed all men do.

BUT THE average choirmaster, in looking for counter-tenors, too often limits his search to a narrow field which does not extend much beyond the confines of his own parish. It is to the youthful graduates of his choir that he is apt to turn for help in solving the alto problem. If he can find any ex-choir-boys who have grown to manhood, and who can readily sing falsetto, he utilizes them to the best of his ability.

The comparative scarcity of the real counter-tenor, and the frequency with which the falsetto alto is met with, will always be considered a practical argument in favor of the latter. The chief characteristics of this second voice are the marked break between the registers, and the *lack of correspondence between the speaking and the singing tones*.

The first variety of counter-tenor may be called a *one-register* voice, and the second a *two-register* voice. The falsetto exists in all

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basses, baritones, and tenors. But in certain voices the lower register, in comparison with the upper, appears to be inadequate, and not particularly useful for singing purposes. In such cases the cultivation of the upper register is suggested by the natural condition of the voice.

A NGLICAN opinion on this subject, as far as Cathedral choirmasters are concerned, is practically unanimous. Among English musicians of note, who have expressed their views in favor of the adult alto, may be mentioned the late Dr. George Garrett, of St. John's College, Cambridge; Dr. Haydn Keeton, of Peterborough Cathedral; and Mr. T. H. Collinson, Mus. Bac., of St. Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh. In addition, we may cite the important fact that many distinguished choir trainers who have not published their opinions in print virtually acknowledge the superiority of adult voices by excluding boy altos from their choirs.

Dr. George C. Martin, organist and choirmaster of St. Paul's Cathedral, in his work on choir training, devotes himself exclusively to the culture of the treble voice.

Anglican Opinion

That he totally ignores the juvenile alto is most significant. His book is

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designed for all grades of choirs, good, bad and indifferent, and the fact that none of his own cathedral boys sing alto is certainly not sufficient to account for his silence. The reader is led to the conclusion that Dr. Martin looks upon the employment of adult altos as *a matter of course*.

Mr. Richard R. Terry, the distinguished organist of Westminster Cathedral, London (Roman), in his recent work entitled "Catholic Church Music," shelves the boy alto question completely. Mr. Terry is one of the most successful choirmasters of the day, and to him belongs the remarkable honor of having trained the only Roman choir in all England that has achieved an international reputation for artistic singing. His remarks on the training of the boy treble are most valuable and practical. Is his silence on the alto question similar to that of Dr. Martin?

BUT WHILE silence seems to give consent, there are authors of prominence who are very outspoken, and who unhesitatingly recommend the adult voice. Dr. A. Madeley Richardson, organist of Southwark Cathedral, London, says: "It is sometimes urged that male altos are scarce, and in some cases cannot be obtained at all. There are plenty of baritones who could sing alto if

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trained, and we recommend that when none ready-formed present themselves, the choir-master should take some young men who have served their time as choir boys, and start them as altos. The male alto, though not often effective as a solo voice, is very useful for purposes of harmony, and blends admirably with boys' and men's natural voices."

Dr. J. Varley Roberts, organist and director of the choir at Magdalen College, Oxford, is still more emphatic. In his

Adult Altos Recommended

treatise on choir training, he says: "Boy altos must necessarily use almost entirely the chest register, which is thick and rough, and this quality of voice is most objectionable in an inner part—indeed, as objectionable as contraltos (*i. e.*, when women sing the alto part). Boys should only be resorted to when it is absolutely impossible to obtain men altos. Many bass singers might sing alto, and if they would confine themselves to exclusively practising the falsetto voice, men altos would be sufficiently numerous to supply the demand. The old Church composers wrote for men altos. Few things are more intolerable than to hear a boy alto, or lady contralto sing the highest part, say, in a trio for alto, tenor, and bass voices, in anthems by such

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Church writers as Greene, Croft, Boyce, etc.

Of course, if it be quite impossible to obtain men altos, then, as a last resource, adopt boy altos or contraltos. For the singing of solos, no doubt a contralto is better than an alto voice, but to obtain the quality of tone most desirable in choirs, men altos are essential.

"For some years it was the experience of the writer of this treatise to have a mixed choir of women and men, several of whom were professional singers. After a certain evensong when Boyce's anthem, 'O where shall wisdom be found,' had been sung, an eminent musician, who happened to be in the church, subsequently remarked of the singular and disastrous effect of a 'thick' chest voice singing the highest part in the verse portion of the anthem. It was, he said, 'as if a bass singer's quality of tone was singing the top part.'

"He said the truth. Nothing can replace the beautiful thin flute-like tone of the pure alto; it brightens the entire quality of the tone of the choir."

Here we have direct advice from two of the most eminent of living choirmasters. But in all fairness we must express surprise at Dr. Roberts' remarks about the female voice.

The "professional" (?) contralto he men-

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tions could not have been a cultivated artist, and that such a singer should have gained admittance to any reputable choir fills one with amazement. Does the well-trained woman contralto sing with "a bass singer's quality of tone"?

IT IS not our object to venture into a scientific explanation of the falsetto vocal mechanism, or to attempt to solve hidden mysteries that have long eluded the grasp of the most celebrated vocal scientists. To this day we do not know exactly what the falsetto register is. All sorts of conflicting theories have been advanced in regard to it, and yet we seem to be as far away from a consensus of opinion as ever¹ Sir Morell Mackenzie gives us some insight into the war of arguments on this subject, in Appendix II. of his remarkable work entitled "The Hygiene of the Vocal Organs,"—a book we commend to the consideration of our readers.

There is, as choirmasters well know, a hesitation on the part of many young men in allowing their voices to be trained in the way advocated by Dr. Richardson and Dr. Roberts. This is

The Falsetto Harmless

(1) Van Broekhoven, of New York, has written an elaborate treatise, soon to be published, disproving all the hitherto accepted theories of cordal vibration in voice production!

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accompanied by an ill-defined fear that the use of the falsetto register is perhaps dangerous to the vocal organs, and this apprehension is intensified by the prevailing prejudice we have referred to.

There are three topics, the consideration of which should be instrumental in restoring confidence, not only to young pupils who contemplate the practise of falsetto singing, but also to the choir directors who undertake their training.

First. The testimony of falsetto altos.

Second. The absence of vocal strain in falsetto production.

Third. The difficulty in reconciling certain scientific evidence favoring the employment of the falsetto register, with the theory that it is injurious.

IN REGARD to the first topic, the writer has for many years past made a point of gaining information from altos whose opinion he considered valuable. And in so doing he has questioned a large number of singers, not only in American, but also in Cathedral and other prominent choirs in England. On the part of young and old singers alike, he has found the evidence refuting the ordinary prejudiced theory, (that the use of the fal-

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setto is harmful) to be both unanimous and convincing. He has never heard of a single case where any vocal defect in early, middle, or later life, could be attributed to falsetto singing.

Furthermore, he can speak from personal experience, having at one time sung alto in a well known New York choir,² and having used the falsetto production ever since in training choir boys, and in teaching pure *timbre* through tonal imitation. In his own case, there has been absolutely no alteration in his ordinary voice, which is basso.

To this must be added the indirect testimony of Dr. Roberts and of Dr. Richardson. Both of these men have had vast experience in male choir training, and they rank among the most expert choirmasters of England. Great numbers of altos have passed under their notice in Oxford and London, and they would not hold themselves responsible for the advice they give if they were at all uncertain of their ground.

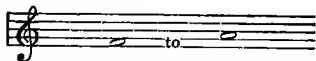
THE SECOND topic has a significant bearing when taken in connection with the statement already made, *viz*: "It is practically impossible to damage the singing voice when undue muscular effort is habit-

(2) St. John's Chapel, Trinity Parish.

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ually avoided." In a great majority of cases such effort seems to be *naturally absent* in the use of the falsetto. When the register is found to be of fairly good range, and normally flexible, (as it often is), a feature of the vocal production is its remarkable *ease*.

One of the most convincing proofs of this is the relief experienced by the numerous baritone who pose as tenors, in changing from chest to falsetto from



These tones sung by forced chest production are as painful to the listener as to the singer. The instant the upper register is used, all vocal strain disappears, and the tones lose their unnatural tenseness.

IN CONSIDERING the third point, we are brought face to face with some scientific truths which are decidedly difficult to controvert.

Evidence is not wanting that the old Italian masters of singing concerned themselves with only two registers of the voice,—*voce di petto*, and *voce di testa*,—corresponding with what we now call chest and falsetto. Their fundamental axioms were, "avoid strain," and,

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"work for purity, and power will take care of itself." Their method of training their tenors was to take them early in life, when their voices were young, flexible, and fresh, and to develop the falsetto downwards, blending it into the chest voice, and completely eradicating any break.³ Many teachers of singing do not believe this can be done, on account of their experiences with average tenor pupils who are *too old* for such equalisation. But with *young* voices it is not only possible to eliminate a break, but even to *prevent the break from putting in an appearance at all*.

Now if the falsetto was an unnatural and injurious production, it seems incredible that the greatest teachers of singing the world has ever known failed to make that discovery!

**Falsetto Used by
Italians**

Sir Morell Mackenzie is very emphatic in regard to the two-register theory of the Italians. He says: "The old Italian masters, who lived in blissful ignorance of the laryngoscope, recognized only two registers of the human voice, the 'chest' and the 'falsetto,' or 'head,'—the two latter terms being exactly synonymous."

(3) See Seller's work, "The Voice in Singing," pages 69-84.

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EMIL BEHNKE, in his valuable treatise, "The Mechanism of the Human Voice," pays an unmistakable tribute to falsetto singing. In the Introduction to his work he deplores the decline in vocal art and the scarcity of excellent voices. He says: "With regard to tenors, however, the great evil is, that with very few exceptions, such as the celebrated Frenchman Roger, they disregard, or at any rate did disregard for a considerable period, the falsetto register, singing everything, however high, in chest voice." He then quotes at considerable length from a publication called "The Opera and the Art of Singing," in which a comparison is made between the method of the famous Duprez, and that of Roger.

"After hearing of Duprez, and how the chest register could be cultivated even into the highest regions of the voice, the public were no longer contented with the use of the falsetto.

"Singers found it a more thankful task to humor the taste of the public than to pay extra regard to the intentions of the composer; for often Meyerbeer himself indicates, by a *pp*, his design that the falsetto and not the chest tone should be employed. That every tenor singer, whether such

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high pressure suited his natural compass or not, strove to screw his voice up, and make effect,' was very natural; for art goes after bread, and a high C with the chest voice often realizes an income of thousands to its fortunate possessor. Roger has made a laudable exception; his beautiful use of the falsetto certainly produces a more agreeable effect than the forced chest tones so unnatural to the organ of many a singer. How widespread is this mistaken notion that the use of the falsetto is entirely contrary to art."

Here we have a plain statement from a noted authority, that the disregard of the falsetto register is a "great evil."

MR. LENNOX BROWNE and Emil Behnke, in their joint work, "Voice, Song, and Speech," call attention to two productions of falsetto. The chief difference appears to be that one is capable of comparatively little development, while tones produced by the other can be made "more powerful by practice, and may be converted into the mixed voice."⁴ This second falsetto is declared to be "perfectly legitimate."

These authors call the register a "mysteri-

(4) Vocal teachers of skill and experience should have little difficulty in appreciating this distinction. See pages 185, 186, of "Voice, Song, and Speech."

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ous" one, and claim that "no satisfactory definition of it has as yet been given anywhere,"—with the exception of their own.

Sir Morell Mackenzie tells us that "the finest alto singers amongst men" spring from bass and baritones who use the falsetto. He advises the smoothing of the break, and says that "if both registers are constantly exercised, no harm is done." He does not mention the natural one-register counter-tenor, and does not favor the *exclusive* use of falsetto, by which he evidently means the constant use of the upper falsetto tones of the bass and baritone without persistent effort to bridge the break.

The boldest and most enthusiastic protagonist of the development of the falsetto is Davidson Palmer, of London. His book, entitled "The Rightly Produced Voice," is well known in England, and we recommend it to American choirmasters. Although Mr. Palmer may be considered somewhat advanced in his views, he has written an instructive and valuable work on a much neglected subject.

Space is lacking for further opinions favoring the proper use of this "mysterious" upper voice, but we have said enough to prove that the argument against the register is very far from being one-sided.

CHAPTER IV.

IT HAS BEEN already intimated that if the counter-tenor is valuable enough to be practically indispensable in male choirs, it is folly to neglect it, or to treat it with contempt.

Even if it were, as some would have us believe, an illegitimate and unnatural voice, the mere fact that it *has come to stay* is sufficient to call for a definite and intelligent system of training.

The first care manifestly lies in the proper selection of material to train. Preference should of course be given to the natural one-register voice. As this, however, is not easily found, choirmasters must, as a rule, utilize the upper registers of baritones and basses.

Selection of Material

But in so doing good judgment is necessary. Men with particularly fine bass or baritone voices should exercise them as such, and should not attempt to sing falsetto. Chest registers differ greatly in quality and power. There are men (and they are by no means uncommon) whose chest registers are useful enough for ordinary conversational purposes, yet of no special value in singing. In such individuals the falsetto is often full in volume, and agreeable in *timbre*. But while it

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is true that nearly all men can produce falsetto tones, it is not to be supposed that nearly all can make a success of singing falsetto. The upper register varies just as the lower does, and in some cases it is, even in an untrained condition, noticeably rich and strong, whereas in other cases it is poor and weak.

In searching for material, therefore, the choirmaster should be very careful not to make a convenience of any voice that happens to present itself.

The admittance of ready-made or self-taught altos, in order to save the time and trouble of training, is a very questionable proceeding, especially in a choir of any artistic pretension. The fact that so many untrained singers have been accepted as choristers has had a great deal to do with the present unsatisfactory status of the counter-tenor voice.

IN REGARD to the difficulty in securing voices for development, we are inclined to think it is exaggerated. Dr. Richardson tells us that baritones who can sing falsetto "are plentiful," and Dr. Roberts says that "there are many bass singers" who can be satisfactorily trained as counter-tenors. The former perhaps had London in mind, and the latter, Oxford. In large cities there certainly should be no lack of such material. In smaller places, although the field of selection is con-

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siderably narrowed, there should be no insurmountable difficulty in securing likely candidates for training.

This question of supply has been managed very largely on the Mr. Wilkins Mickawber principle. We wait for voices to "turn up" in some mysterious way, and when they fail to put in an appearance we say there are none! Voices should be sought for; prejudice should be overcome, and erroneous opinions removed. And in all this a reasonable amount of industry, common sense, patience, and tact, will be found necessary.

In selecting voices for training, the choirmaster should use the discretion justly expected from every teacher in undertaking the culture of a voice, and he should carefully estimate the vocal capabilities of the pupil before allowing him to enter upon a course of instruction.

Examination of Young voices are preferable
Voices because they are elastic and
 flexible, and present fewer
 difficulties in equalisation. In-
deed the voice of an old, or even middle aged
alto, is very often unyielding and incapable of
improvement.

In the examination of voices it must be remembered that Church composers have raised the "working range" of the male alto. Some of the sixteenth and seventeenth century writ-

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ers carried the voice to extraordinary depths.

Here are a few examples:

From "Bow Thine Ear."

WILLIAM BIRD.

de so - late and.... void, de

so - late and void,

From "God is Our Hope."

Dr. GREENE.

we not... be mov - ed, is in the midst of

us, is in the midst of

From "Hosanna to the Son of David."

ORLANDO GIBBONS.

That com-eth in the name of the Lord.

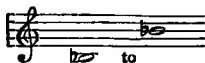
From "Prepare Ye the Way."

MICHAEL WISE.

Lord, make straight in the des - ert a high-way for our God.

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IN RESPECT to range, there has been a decided change, and in first testing the upper register, it is advisable to try the pupil carefully from



leaving the tones below and above these limits for future consideration, and possible development. Within this octave lies the modern *tessitura* of the alto voice.

When the vowel sound of Italian *a* can be sung throughout the B-flat scale, quietly, without effort, preserving a smooth, agreeable and even *timbre*, free from any "queer" or cutting quality, the prognosis may be considered favorable.

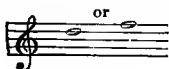
In making this test, the probable value of the voice should be gauged by its *quality* rather than by its quantity, or power.

Lennox Browne says: "Voices differ as much as faces. Strongly as they resemble each other in general structure, there are no two exactly alike." The truth of this will be readily seen in training the falsetto register. Some pupils will have a low range, extending down to



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without a break. Others will sing up to



without difficulty. In dealing with the former, a great deal of care is necessary in developing the upper tones: There is no voice more dis-

Difference in distressing than that of the male
Voices alto when the higher notes
 are forced or strained. In

dealing with the latter, an equal amount of heedfulness will be found necessary in smoothing the break. Although there are exceptions to the rule, it will be found that the low voices will present an advantage in regard to the break, and a corresponding disadvantage in the region about

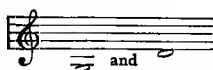


With the high voices the ease will often be *vice versa*.

CONSIDERABLE irregularity will be noticed both as to the location and the prominence of the break. The voices of well trained choir boys sometimes pass through the counter-tenor range, during mutation, without any break at all. They descend even-

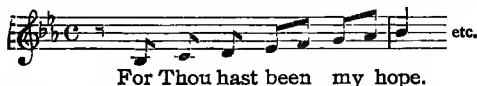
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ly to their final destination, which may be alto, tenor, baritone, or bass. They may sometimes be trained temporarily or permanently as altos, according to circumstances, and excellent voices they often become, on account of their perfect smoothness. But the average falsetto alto is apt to have a pronounced break, somewhere between



although the location is variable, and may be higher. There is no rule about it.

In an English book on choir training, Dr. Garrett gives an amusing account of a performance he once heard of Weldon's anthem, "Hear my crying." He says: "The passage,



I heard sung by an adult alto who broke badly between E-flat and F. The effect was funny beyond description."

A factor of success in eradicating, or in ameliorating the break, is the *youthfulness* of the pupil. Although this is a general truth, and applies to any break in any voice, it has a special bearing on the culture of the male alto.

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VOICES ARE occasionally met, with in which the break is distinctly marked, and almost impossible to smooth; yet, in a certain percentage of cases, it may lie so far *below* the *tessitura* that its elimination may seem practically unnecessary. Such "two-register" voices of course cannot be classified as natural counter-tenors. Nor do they always belong to the average falsetto-alto type in which, during youth, the break is often removable. They sometimes show a falsetto production which appears to coincide with that described by Browne and Behnke as incapable of "a *crescendo* of any importance." But it will be found that certain voices of this kind can produce a very perceptible *crescendo*, and a development after training, which, although not merging into what those authorities call the "mixed voice," is nevertheless decidedly useful for choral purposes.

In young men this species of falsetto is often elusive, and difficult to discover. The writer has found it where he least expected it, and has failed to detect it where he thought it would exist. That it is harm-

Two Kinds of Falsetto

ful we doubt very much. There is absolutely no strain connected with it, and it would be necessary to use it *exclusively* not

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only in singing, but also in *speaking*, in order to permanently alter the lower register.

The authorities quoted claim that it shows little development of power after cultivation; as to any damage resulting from its use, they are silent.

Their claims are based upon physiological deductions which ought to be conclusive, but it would be very interesting to know how far the experiences of vocal teachers substantiate them. It must be borne in mind also that this mysterious *division* of falsetto is the "discovery" of Browne and Behnke. No other authorities mention it, and it is more than likely that further "discoveries" will be made by other writers.

BUT, as before remarked, *promising voices* should be selected for training, and not those which present uncertainties and complications.

In regard to the vocal exercises necessary, everything depends upon the skill of the teacher in their application, and the intelligence of the pupil in their use. Too much emphasis cannot be laid upon this point. A great quantity and variety of exercises often prove cumbersome and valueless in vocal training, especially with pupils who lack power of concentration.

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One exercise, thoroughly understood, and correctly practiced, may make a voice. A hundred, carelessly sung, will miss the mark and be a sheer waste of time. The fundamental work in securing proper tone placing, purity of timbre, and equalisation, may be done with two exercises,—*sustained tones*, and *scales*. Upon the first may be built a complete system of voice culture. Even by the *exclusive* use of sustained tones, a clever instructor will succeed in developing the voice. Scales are not only useful in themselves, but they admit of all kinds of variants, by which variety can be secured when needed.

Books of alto exercises may be sometimes desirable, but the teacher who *depends* upon such publications is handicapped. Voices with certain peculiarities may require *special vocalises*, and what these should be can be determined only by the preceptor, and after some experience with the particular voice in hand. In a majority of the so-called "vocal methods" issued in book form, the exercises are to a great extent mere padding, their chief object being to increase the number of pages.

An exercise of value will be found in commencing a tone *pianissimo*, expanding it carefully to *mezzo forte*, then to *forte*, diminishing back again to *pianissimo*. (*Messa di*

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voce). This process will reveal pretty clearly the type of voice under training. The various scale *vocalises* should be utilized, and after sufficient progress has been made in equalisation, and in the general strengthening of the voice, the standard studies of such composers as Bordogni, Nava, Lamperti, and Henschel, may be taken up. The writer has found Concone's "Forty Lessons for Bass," and "Fifty Lessons for the Medium of the Voice," transposed for low voice, very useful. Also Ferdinand Sieber's exercises for Bass and Alto.

THE PRODUCTION of pure *timbre* in the male alto is of supreme importance.

It is the absence of this in the untrained or ill-trained voice that has helped to stigmatize it with the brand of illegitimacy. The ordinary quality, as heard in a large number of male choirs, is metallic, shrill, biting, and cat-like. Critics, and music editors of newspapers, take a special delight in referring to the voice as "detestible," "disgraceful," and "grotesque." However prejudiced and unscientific their remarks may be, they show the deplorable effect of bad singing upon the reputation of the counter-tenor.

The *timbre* of the cultivated voice is the diametral opposite of what we have just

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mentioned. It is pure and beautiful, of adequate carrying power, and blends perfectly with the voices of highly trained boys. The object of the teacher should be to aim at a quality that will melt into, and be absolutely homogeneous with, the smooth tone of the artistically trained treble.

Importance of Pure Tone

In a properly cultivated chorus of boy sopranos it is impossible to detect any voice, in any part of the range, low or high. The choir-master himself, although he knows the vocal habits of every boy, cannot individualize a single voice if he stands with his back to the chorus, or closes his eyes so that he cannot see his choristers.

Thoroughly equalised voices of boys are like globules of quicksilver in a cup,—they amalgamate instantly, and lose their identity. In poorly trained choirs, on the other hand, the voices *rasp*, and “stick out” here and there. Like oil and water, they will not mix. The ideal tone to develop in the counter-tenor is that which *fuses* and coalesces with the trained boy voice. Dr. Roberts describes it as “bright” and “flute-like.” But in the cultured voice it is something more than this; it is round and full, and has a certain mellow richness that is totally lacking in the neglected voice.

CHAPTER V.

IN SUMMING up, we may classify the counter-tenor under two general varieties, with a further dual division of the falsetto alto.

There are therefore three types, as follows:

1. The natural counter-tenor, in which the singing and speaking tones agree. A decidedly valuable and legitimate voice that has been slighted in the accepted works on singing. A *one-register* voice, without a break.

2. The falsetto alto, in which the singing and speaking tones disagree. There is a break between the registers which can be smoothed, and (in young voices), eliminated by training. A *two-register* voice, in which both registers are used in singing.

3. The falsetto alto, in which the singing and speaking tones disagree. There is a break which cannot be removed. A *two-register* voice, in which the upper register only is employed in singing.

Choirmasters should always be on the watch for type one. We have already explained why it is misunderstood and neglected. As for its supposed rarity, no one can wonder at it, as the voice

is practically unsought.

Three Types

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Type two is commended in an indirect way by various authorities. Untrained, it is justly scored by Mackenzie for causing undue prejudice. He says: "There is a strong impression in *unsophisticated minds* (the italics are ours) that the falsetto is a kind of 'dodge,' to which it is not fair to resort. This idea is probably founded on the fact that the untrained falsetto is usually so poor and disagreeable in quality."

Type three is at present the one most frequently met with in choirs. As already stated, an important feature of it is that the break is often so low that it does not show in ordinary church compositions. In some cases this voice appears to be incapable of any decided *messa di voce*, but there are marked exceptions.

While we have any amount of testimony proving that his voice production is harmless, its exclusive use is not advocated. But what is meant by "exclusive use"? A choir singer during one weekly rehearsal and two Sunday services, consuming altogether four or five hours, sings about a quarter of the time, or at most an hour and a half. During the rest of the one hundred and sixty-eight hours of the week, deducting for sleep and silence, he uses his colloquial voice as bass, baritone, or tenor. Does this mean "exclusive" use of falsetto? Can any sane person believe such use to be in-

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jurious? The truth of the matter is that the reasonable and judicious employment of the falsetto can hurt no one.

When the distinguished organist of Magdalen College speaks of basses and baritones using this production "exclusively," he means only with reference to choir singing and vocal practice. They are still to remain basses and baritones, although their voices as such may be too light to be of any particular choral value.

What would happen to a bass or baritone if the upper register were to be used *always*, in singing *and in speaking*, nobody knows. We may theorize, and venture hypothetical statements as to the probabilities of such a vocal proceeding. The age of the singer would have a bearing upon the final result. Instead of the lower register becoming lost, it might be retained in a modified form, especially if a persistent effort were made to extend the falsetto downward as far as possible.

As far as we know, such an experiment has never been tried under scientific regulation. To be of positive value, it would have to be carried on for a number of years, and the result vouched for by authoritative testimony.

The final outcome might completely upset some theories which are now supposed to be invulnerable.

THE ADULT MALE ALTO

ALL THREE varieties of counter-tenor suffer and degenerate from lack of correct vocal exercise. This is especially true of voices classed under the second and third divisions. The male alto is essentially an ecclesiastical voice, and as such fails to get the use and practice other voices get through secular employment. *All voice users, and particularly chorus singers in church choirs, should bear in mind the care and trouble soloists take to keep their vocal organs in the best possible condition. They practice assiduously, and regularly. Any singer, whether he be a bass, baritone, tenor, or alto, who confines himself merely to chorus

Practice Necessary work, and neglects to exercise his voice outside of his regular church duties, is very apt to run down and deteriorate vocally. Little by little defects creep in and become chronic. *The male alto requires con-*

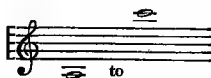
*Church singers often express amazement and indignation at the bad singing of the clergy, especially in places where an advanced type of choral services compels them to take their due part. The inartistic intoning of clergymen, who neglect their voices and never practice, should serve as a valuable object-lesson to choristers. The average clergyman persistently fails to see the connection between singing and elocution. The fact that an artistic singing voice goes hand in hand with an artistic speaking voice is generally lost upon him.

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stant supervision and careful practice and training. There is no voice that declines more rapidly under neglect.

IT HAS BEEN asserted that the use of the chest register of the boy alto, as heard in the majority of choirs, forms one of the strongest arguments in favor of the counter-tenor. The boy alto has its proper place, and deserves recognition. The writer does not wish his views in regard to this question to be misinterpreted. In his work on the Training of Choir Boys he has outlined the proper method of cultivating the lower octave of the voice.* The belief that boys cannot be taught to sing alto with absolute purity of tone, entirely free from chest quality, is a delusion.

Skilfully trained boy trebles sing all the way from



with *one* even timbre, without the slightest admixture of any quality of tone, differing from that of the low, medium, or upper voice. They are not taught a low quality, a medium, and

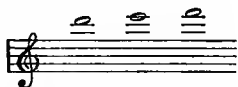
*See page 60, 61, and 82, of "Practical Hints on the Training of Choir Boys." (The H. W. Gray Co., N. Y., Agents for Novello & Co., London.)

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The Boy Alto a high quality. They are made to produce one kind of tone, perfect in itself.

The range just quoted is not actually needed in singing the compositions ordinarily used in church, but in the best choirs the trebles are exercised above and *below* the usual limits.

The majority of boys have very high voices, and it is a common thing for choristers to reach the notes



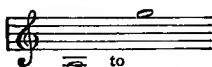
with great ease and certainty. But the same choristers can be taught to sing



without the least trace of tonal coarseness.

The trained treble has more than two octaves in his voice, and the lower half of his range is *available for alto purposes*.

Some boys (they are decidedly in the minority) have comparatively low voices, ranging from



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In such cases the lower tones are sometimes unusually full and well adapted for alto singing. But whether the trained boy voice belongs to either of these classes, low or high, *it is produced exactly in the same way*. In either case the alto *tessitura* is included in the vocal range, and the tonal quality of the treble and alto parts blends and becomes indistinguishable.

BE IT remembered we are speaking of highly trained voices. It is in the management of the lower octave of the boy voice that the ability of the choirmaster is put to the severest test. Out of every hundred choirs where boy altos are employed, it is perfectly safe to affirm that in only *one* will pure voicing be found. In the remaining ninety and nine the coarseness of the alto part will be plainly recognizable. The statement of Dr. J. Varley Roberts, that boy altos "must necessarily use almost entirely the chest register, which is thick and rough," and "most objectionable," may, from a purely theoretical standpoint, need considerable modification. But from a practical point of view Dr. Roberts is right.

One of the most eminent and distinguished of the organists and choirmasters of the Uni-

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versity of Cambridge, England, has placed himself on record in declaring that the question of the break in the boy alto should cause little or no trouble, because a boy could sing up to fourth line D without showing his break at all!

In other words, a boy alto should eliminate his upper register entirely, sing thick tone consistently throughout his entire vocal range, and thus save his choirmaster all anxiety and trouble in equalising his voice! When such theories emanate from the classic shades of Cambridge, a renowned centre of ecclesiastical music, one is tempted to believe that the culture of the boy voice in England is not all that it should be.

THE ARTISTIC singing of boy altos is very rarely to be heard, and it depends entirely upon the expert raining of the choirmaster. Browne and Behnke, in their treatise entitled "The Child's Voice," cite the beautiful singing of the boys in the choir of St. Cunibert's Church, Cologne, and call attention to the fact that the *altos* use the *head voice only*, down to the lowest notes.

The tone of the trebles and altos is described as "soft, velvety, and mysterious," with a "wonderful evenness from top to bottom of

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St. Cunibert's Choir

the range." The present writer, having referred to this particular choir in his own book, just mentioned, once made a musical pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Cunibert, especially to hear these celebrated altos. The occasion happened to be a notable one, falling upon a high feast day. Special preparation had been made for an elaborate choral service.

The choir was formed in line outside the church, and the ground was strewn with flowers, over which the choristers walked. A sort of processional hymn was sung, unaccompanied, and to the amazement of the writer it was indescribably bad! What followed the hymn was worse. The voices of the trebles and altos were raw and utterly untrained. The sacristan, on being questioned, revealed the secret of the change. The former choirmaster, under whom the choir had risen to such fame, had departed,—and with him had departed his vocal art. His successor knew nothing of it!

When necessary, boys must be used as altos. There may be no counter-tenors available, and female altos are ecclesiastically out of place in male choirs. Under such circumstances the choirmaster should train his trebles and altos together, using the same *vocalises* for both,

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from A below the staff to F or G above. The trebles, of course, may be taken higher. Boys with unusually low voices need not sing above fourth space E if they experience any great difficulty in the upper region. The alto *timbre* should not differ from that of the treble. The number of voices assigned to the lower part should vary according to their strength. It is far better to have from six to ten light voices of beautiful quality, than half the number when purity is sacrificed to power.

THE TEMPTATION to increase the tonal strength of the lower octave by the employment of raucous chest tone, or mixed tone, proves irresistible to the rank and file of choirmasters. Where the altos are thus infected the trebles do not escape contagion. The very fact that the once famous "soft" and "velvety" *timbre* of the St. Cunibert altos is quoted in a standard work on singing as being "wonderful" and "mysterious," indicates pretty clearly that what is commonly heard is quite the reverse.

The difficulty of the boy alto question is complex. Choirmasters who excel in training treble voices are not over-plentiful,—there are not enough to meet the demand. Those who can train altos skilfully are even scarcer; it

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is the lower part of the boy voice that is most difficult to manage. To this must be added the sight-reading problem, and the fact that boys lose their voices, whereas counter-tenors do not.

It is especially in compositions sung *a cappella* that the ordinary coarse voicing of boy altos manifests itself in all its impurity. A noisy organ accompaniment will do much toward covering up vocal defects, but the instant the voices float without instrumental assistance, crudities in timbre become immediately apparent.

So also it is in unaccompanied singing that the "self-made" and ill-trained adult alto appears to such signal disadvantage.

Between the boy who sings like a frog, and the man who sings like a calliope, choice is indeed difficult!

The solution of the matter is plain enough; the alto voice, whether of the boy or of the man, should be scientifically and artistically cultivated.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PREFACE to this book states that there are vocal questions of vital importance connected with falsetto singing,—problems that have a direct bearing upon voice production in general. In all of the hitherto published works on singing, the explanation of the falsetto register (and all vocal registers) has been made by reference to certain mysterious changes in the *vibration of the vocal ligaments*.

The most recent work of importance, "The True Method of Tone Production," by Mr. John Van Broekhoven, of New York, takes

the ground that the singing voice *is not produced by such vibration*, but by the pockets of the larynx,

New Theory of the Voice

the air vibrating in the inner larynx in much the same way as it does in the cup of the trumpet.

Among certain questions, bearing upon the old theory of vibration of the vocal lips, asked by the author of this most remarkable work, are the following:

1. How can the thin edges of two bundles of muscles, known as the vocal cords, by vibrating, produce one absolutely pure tone, identical in pitch and quality?

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2. How can the mere edge of a bundle of muscles forming a curve or concave line be strung sufficiently tense to produce a tone by the vibration of the curved edge?

3. How can the thin edges of two opposite bundles of muscles vibrate so as to produce tone, when their two extreme ends are pressed together, the thin edges forming an elliptical opening between them?

4. How can the so-called vocal cords—which (as Dr. Mackenzie states) are not strings, but folds of membranous muscular tissue, forming a bevelled mass towards the rear vibrate so as to produce a tone like a vibrating string?

5. How can the whole length of the vocal cords vibrate as one unit when one-third their length is composed of gristle, and the other two-thirds of ligaments?

6. How can the whole singing range of the male and female voice, of almost five octaves, be produced by the vibration of the thin edges of the two vocal cords, not even one inch in length?

7. How is it possible for altos with longer vocal cords than tenors to possess a natural higher vocal compass than tenors, if the length of the vocal cords condition the pitch?

8. How is it possible for old men and

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women, who always sing and speak in falsetto, when the muscles of the vocal organ have become weak and infirm, to do so if the falsetto tones—as claimed—are produced by a firm contraction and a high rate of vibration of only a part of the vocal cords?

MR. VAN BROEKHOVEN has kindly furnished us with the following remarks upon falsetto production, written especially for this treatise.

His discoveries regarding the action of the false vocal cords are of the utmost importance, and his theories should be thoroughly tested. Much that has hitherto remained inexplicable becomes comparatively simple when viewed from his standpoint.

The ease with which the old Italians bridged the chest and falsetto registers *in young voices*, and the remarkably rapid mutation in some boy voices, are, in the writer's opinion, two subjects that are easily explained under the new theory.

Choirmasters will do well in studying Mr. Van Broekhoven's work.

“**B**EFORE DEFINING my own discoveries as to the true functions of the vocal organ in the production of the *falsetto voice*, I will quote some facts pre-

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sented by the foremost French and English medical investigators. Dr. Mandle asserts that in the production of the falsetto tones the pocket bands are drawn down so as to press on the upper surface of the vocal cords.

"Dr. Gougenheim and Dr. Lemoyes observed that in the production of the falsetto tones by a bass singer the pocket bands were drawn down over the vocal cords.

"Dr. Gordon Holmes states that in falsetto tones the rim of the vestibule suffers a progressive and marked constriction, and that the falsetto tones can be produced even if the soft palate be destroyed by disease.

"Dr. Martel holds that in falsetto *it is not the vocal cords*, but the air itself, which is the sounding body. In falsetto tones the pocket bands contract and approach towards the middle line. The higher the tone, the closer together are the pocket bands.

Opinions of Medical Experts

"Dr. Mackenzie states that in the falsetto voice of man, and the head voice of woman, the vocal lips are almost closed, and that the falsetto can be produced *without any accompanying elevation of the larynx*.

"The facts here presented corroborate my own discoveries. But these medical investi-

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gators give no clue as to the connection of these functions with the production of the falsetto tones. For a detailed account of this I must refer the reader to my book, 'The True Method of Tone Production.'*

"Here I can only give a general idea of the true nature of the production of the falsetto tones. The most noticeable feature in the production of the falsetto voice is a feeling of muscular relaxation. The falsetto is often produced by old people who have lost the muscular strength to control the pocket bands, or so-called false vocal cords.

"THESE POCKET BANDS are a set of vocal lips found in the inner larynx tube immediately above the vocal cords proper. By their action upwards, downwards, and sideways, they alter the inner space, or so-called cup of the larynx, where the vocal tone is produced, just as it is produced in the cup of the trumpet mouthpiece by the breath current of the trumpet player.

"These pocket bands are very muscular, but extremely flexible, and may be trained to perform many muscular functions. In the boy and girl voice these bands are comparatively

*The H. W. Gray Company, New York. Novello and Company, London.

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short, and the openings into the so-called pockets, or ventricles of Morgagni, are also small. However, during the period of puberty the whole physical condition, and larynx proportions of the boy, undergo a great change, although, as far as the larynx is concerned, this change is less marked in the girl. In the boy the proportions of the larynx increase in depth and width. The whole cup cavity becomes enlarged, and this is particularly noticeable through the growth of the Adam's apple.

This growth also produces a change in the muscular proportions, strength, and functions of the pocket bands. In some boys the muta-

The Pocket Bands tion of voice takes place gradually, and the new voice is established by degrees. But in other boys

the change occurs abruptly, in a very short period, and in such cases a very sudden break or change to the adult voice is produced.

"The physical change may be active in the development of the cartilaginous parts of the vocal organ, particularly of the shield cartilages, which by their growth increase the size of the pockets, while the muscles and ligaments used by the boy in singing still remain undeveloped.

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“*But in an abrupt mutation the ligaments may be torn apart by growth over night, and at once this exposes the larger proportions of the pockets resulting from the gradual development of the shield cartilages.

“As a result of this sudden change, the boy will produce alternately tones in his boy compass and in his new adult compass. This fact demonstrates that the boy has the capacity to produce *both voice ranges*. I am of the opinion that the lack of good tenor voices, as well as of male altos, is due directly to the neglect of our choirmasters and vocal teachers in developing the boy voice after the period of change, by abandoning the boy voice compass entirely, and forcing or limiting the voice to the lower adult or chest compass.

“It seems to me most absurd that the cultivation of the adult falsetto, which in reality is produced by the earlier larynx proportion developed by the boy, should be totally neglected by voice trainers after mutation. What the boy did before the change he can do again, after; of course under altered conditions.

“**B**UT THESE conditions have heretofore been misunderstood. Hence it can be well conceived that the opin-

*Lablache's voice changed in a single night.

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ion is held by teachers that the boy's early training is absolutely useless in developing the voice of the adult male. This opinion I am able to refute.

"An excellent example is found in Jean de Reszke, whose boy compass was neglected, but after many years was again regained by his own effort, but not by his

Voice of De Reszke teachers'. The origin of the falsetto is directly to be attributed to the action

and physical possibilities of the pocket bands, and the nature of the ventricles, or pockets.

"A full alto tone can be obtained only by vocalists with large pockets, as in the case of contraltos and basses. The alto compass can also be produced by mezzo-sopranos, tenors and baritones. As has been asserted by the medical experts, quoted at the beginning, the falsetto is produced by the dropping of the edges of the pocket bands. By this action the cup space of the inner larynx is reduced, which results in the production of a high, thin, flute-like tone, without volume and power; a tone similar to that emitted by old people.

"**I**N THE PRODUCTION of this falsetto tone the singer experiences a complete relaxation of the muscles of the inner larynx. This complete relaxation is wrong.

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The singer in dropping the pocket bands should be able to *retain muscular control over them*, so as to increase the small cup space to a more expanded form of the cup. When he is able to do this, he is able to *improve* the thin falsetto tone, and to *increase its volume* and power so as to obtain a full head tone quality.

"Now this training of the false vocal cords, necessary for the production of a full head tone instead of a thin falsetto, requires less effort on the part of the singer than is required in the production of the higher tones in the chest register. that is, if this method of tone production is well understood and carefully developed.

"The head, like the falsetto tones, require less muscular effort than is necessary for the chest tones. They require less breath, and are

obtained with a smaller proportion of the larynx cavity. In fact, head tones cannot be delivered

**Strengthening of
Pocket Bands** with a full breath power. The tone volume of the head tone, or alto range in male altos, must be obtained by the expansion of the larynx cavity while the pocket bands are dropped.

"Hence, the strengthening of the muscles of these pocket bands is the chief object to be looked to by the singer for the acquisition of a

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good head tone quality, in the male voice as well as that of the female voice. In the change of register from the head to the medium, or chest, the action of the pocket bands is responsible. The blending of the tone quality between the chest and head of male voices is a difficult matter. The upper chest tones should be subdued, and the head tones improved, so that the juncture is made perfect. In this training the choirmaster will have to use great patience, knowledge, good judgment, and be in possession of a cultivated ear before good results can be obtained. When choirmasters possess the qualifications indicated, there will no longer be a dearth of good tenors and adult male altos for choir purposes."

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